




CITY OF GRAND RAPIDS ADMINISTRATIVE POLICY

NUMBER: 19-01	DATE: January 4, 2019
REVISIONS:	
ISSUED BY: City Manager	SIGNED: 

SUBJECT: COMMUNICATIONS WITH THE MEDIA

PURPOSE: The City of Grand Rapids receives dozens of media inquiries every day. In responding to these requests for information and interviews, we have two primary goals:

- Provide accurate information or an interview within the media's deadline, which generally is within a few hours of the request
- Ensure the City Manager and City Commission have advance notice of potential news stories and media and constituent inquiries

POLICY: The City of Grand Rapids and its departments are committed to accommodating the media's requests. This must be done in coordination with the Office of Communications and aligned with the City's strategic communications strategy.

The Office of Communications is the primary point of contact for media – specifically, the Managing Director of Communications or the Media Relations Manager.

The media generally reaches out to the Office of Communications first for information or to request an interview. When this happens, the Managing Director of Communications or the Media Relations Manager contacts the appropriate Department Director/Manager to collect information or coordinate an interview. The Department Director/Manager is required to do their best to provide the information or be available for the interview within the reporter's deadline. Directors/Managers may designate spokespeople within their departments to communicate with the media.

Occasionally, a reporter may contact a Department directly without calling the Office of Communications. In this case, the Department Director/Manager or delegate may provide the reporter with routine information that is readily accessible to the public. Immediately following this interaction, the Department Director/Manager or delegate is required to inform their supervisor and the Managing Director of Communications of the media inquiry by phone or email. Include the media outlet, reporter's name, contact information (e-mail, office and/or cell phone numbers), topic, questions asked by the reporter and the City's responses.

If the media inquiry is outside the scope of routine information that is readily accessible to the public, the Department Director/Manager or delegate may **not** provide further comment until discussing the media inquiry with their supervisor and the Managing Director of Communications. The Department Director/Manager or delegate is required to obtain the topic information and anticipated questions from the reporter before consulting with the Managing Director of Communications. No media interview or the scheduling of an interview is to take place without consultation with the Managing Director of Communications.

The Managing Director of Communications will review the reporter's questions with the Department Director/Manager or delegate, determine the appropriate spokesperson and assist with the development of messaging points and the practicing of responses. It is acceptable to request that the Managing Director of Communications or other City staff sit in on the media interview.

If the media inquiry is related to an emergency situation and involves the public's safety, the Department Director/Manager or designee may talk with the reporter before consulting with the Managing Director of Communications. A follow-up call or email to the Managing Director of Communications with the aforementioned information is required immediately following the interview.

If a reporter contacts a City employee who is not a Department Director/Manager or delegate for any kind of information – routine information that is readily accessible to the public or information outside the scope of routine – the employee may **not** provide comment. Instead, the employee is required to gather information from the reporter – media

outlet, reporter's name, contact information (e-mail, office and/or cell phone numbers), inquiry topic and reporter's questions – and let the reporter know that a City spokesperson will get back with them. The employee then is required to inform their supervisor and the Managing Director of Communications of the media inquiry by phone or email. Include the media outlet, reporter's name, contact information (e-mail, office and/or cell phone numbers), topic and questions.

During all media interviews, Department Directors/Managers or delegates are required to:

- Remember you are representing the City and need to conduct yourself accordingly – behave professionally and courteously and avoid editorializing
- Provide information that reflects the City management's interpretation and administration of City Commission policy – not your personal views
- Provide information that is accurate and never speculative in nature
- Answer each question directly – if you don't know the answer, respond with, "I don't know, but I'm happy to get back to you on that," and then follow through by finding out the answer within one business day
- Direct the reporter to the Managing Director of Communications if you are uncomfortable answering a reporter's question
- Always assume that conversations with media representatives from "hello" to "goodbye" are on the record. Do not participate in off-the-record conversations or divulge confidential information on an off-the-record basis.
- Remember an interview is not a conversation with a reporter but with the reporter's audience
- Consider ending an interview if the reporter becomes abusive or discourteous and say, "I don't feel I can discuss that at this time. Please direct your questions to the Managing Director of Communications."
- Never say, "No comment," and instead direct the reporter to the Managing Director of Communications

Additionally, all news conferences, news releases and other public announcements of City events, projects and activities must be coordinated with the Managing Director of Communications.

The Managing Director of Communications and Media Relations Manager are responsible for coordinating the setup of City news conferences. News conferences need to be well-organized and present timely, newsworthy information. The following guidelines will help make a City news conference successful:

- Hold a news conference when you need to provide new and/or updated information to the media in a timely manner or when several requests for information have been received by various news organizations
- Make sure there aren't other major events scheduled at the time of the news conference. The best days for media coverage are Tuesday through Thursday. News conferences work best in the mornings and early afternoons so reporters can meet their deadlines.
- The location needs to be easy for the media to access. Take into consideration the backdrop behind the person speaking. The Commission Chambers is an established and appropriate news conference site. Suitable outdoor locations may include Calder Plaza, parks, etc. (weather permitting). If outside, consider potential weather concerns and have an alternate location available.
- Always consider the possibility of distractions or issues that may cause problems during the news conference – e.g. excessive foot traffic, blocking entryways, noise, safety concerns, etc.
- Consider the floor space needed for the presenter/s, podium, media and their equipment
- The setup needs to include a lectern and microphone. Depending on the venue, provide chairs for the audience. If the news conference is indoors, space needs to be available for TV cameras at the back of the room or somewhere in the room that allows a direct line of sight to presenters.
- Consider the visual impact of an event and display a City of Grand Rapids banner behind the presenters or the City seal or logo on the front of the lectern
- Consider accessibility and alternate communications – Spanish and sign language interpretation – when holding a news conference
- If you want to invite local policymakers to attend or speak at the news conference, send an invitation as early as possible – one month in advance is optimal.

- Careful thought needs to be given to who needs to speak and how many presenters are appropriate. Each presenter needs to have a specific topic to cover and have prepared talking points crafted in coordination with the Managing Director of Communications. Each presenter's comments need to be limited to no more than 5 minutes. Each presenter also needs to be prepared to answer media questions.
- The Managing Director of Communications or a Department Director/Manager or delegate serves as the moderator for the news conference, introduces the presenters and facilitates Q&A with the media
- The Managing Director of Communications or Media Relations Manager needs to coordinate with the Cable TV Administrator on the livestream and taping of news conferences